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ABSTRACT

Described are activities used in an interdisciplinary arts program with moderately and severely/profoundly mentally retarded, perceptually impaired, emotionally disturbed, and physically handicapped students. Objectives and procedures are discussed for activities dealing with bodies (including body tracing), visual and poetic circles, textures, rhythms, and masks. Lessons include dance, poetry, and art activities. A final section provides samples of student poetry. (CL)

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the eagle soars...

The eagle flies
over the mountains
round and round
He's like a dove
that shoots up into the air.
He stops wandering.
Will he ever turn around.

Chris M
Pinesbridge School

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
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*...the artist,
the teacher,
and the handicapped*

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The artists who dedicated not only their personal artistic selves to the children but also their ideas, plans and time to this text deserve a note of appreciation: Carol Vassallo, dancer, Susan Yaruta Foyder, poet, Nancy Beckerman, artist, Richard Bottwin, artist, Rita Louise Boettger, dancer and Ellen Lyons, artist.

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The Sites

The pilot project extended from October 1976 - June 1977 and included students from three sites in Westchester County, New York.:

1. The Margaret Chapman School in Hawthorne, NY, a residential facility for the trainable mentally retarded, many of whom have physical and emotional handicaps.
2. The Pinesbridge School, a regional public day school serving the component public school districts of Northern Westchester and Putnam counties. Its student body is composed of moderately, severely and profoundly mentally retarded, many of whom have severe physical or emotional problems.
3. Crompond and Mohansic Elementary schools, two public schools in Yorktown Heights, where students who are perceptually impaired, emotionally disturbed or physically handicapped, are being returned to the mainstream of public education for normal children.

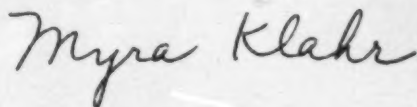
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Foreword

For the first time anywhere, an interdisciplinary arts program for the handicapped has been designed by the artists themselves with the guidance and supervision of the New York State Poets in the Schools administration. When first meeting with the administrators at Northern Westchester-Putnam BOCES, the local education agency who administered the project, none of us knew what to expect either of each other, the artists or the children. Learning more from the children than any handbook or graduate course could have taught us, we offer you our programs, experiences and some of the fruits of our labors, in this text.

The Eagle Soars is a document of what we did and what we discovered. We worked with students having a wide range of conditions, from the profoundly mentally retarded to varying degrees of physical disability. Their handicaps lead people to expect less than they are capable of giving. Grateful when we started, they were proud when we finished and saw themselves in the new light of their own creative capacities.

The dancer, the poet and the visual artists worked as a team, often centering their work around the artistic concepts they shared. Most important, because the artists gave of that kernel which is the essence of their own art, the children responded and exposed the core of themselves that we rarely see. To the children who permitted us to touch their lives, we are grateful for all that they taught us.



Myra Klahr, Director

New York State Poets in the Schools

Objective: To help the children find a new awareness of their bodies in three ways: art (by drawing their body outlines), dance (through movement) and poetry (helping the children verbalize their feelings about their bodies and to tell what their bodies do).

Procedure: Begin by having the children form a circle. Have each child say hello (to create a warm feeling). Next read the following poem, while the dancer acts it out. Read with expression and bring the children into the poem by asking them to act out certain parts too. The poem:

MY BODY IS A POEM

My body is a poem
'cause I like the way it works,
and I like the way it looks,
and I like the way it comes together
without any zippers, snaps or hooks.

I like the way I can roll
my round-round head around.
I like the way I can close
my grey, blue, green brown eyes
and take a long lazy spin around.

I like the way my feet can kick
up into the warm spring air,
and I like the way my arms
can stretch up, down, out
as far as they can go.

And I like the way
I bend in half,
and finger-touch my toes
or even, I like the way
that I can sit and stay
like a quiet little ball.

My body is a poem
'cause I like the way it works,
and I like the way it looks,
and I like the way it comes together
without any zippers, snaps or hooks.

(S. Yaruta-Foyder)



Next, the lesson moves into dance, followed by art. The art lesson consists of outlining the shape of each child. Later, in another lesson, the children will fill in their bodies. After each child has been outlined, move back into poetry, asking each what it felt like, did he or she like it? Was it scary? What part of the art did you like best? etc. Thus the poem. Poems can later be written on the body.

Observations: The children seemed to enjoy this lesson but the poet must ask questions in order to pull the poem out.

Followup: Concrete poems written around the body shape about arms, legs etc. outlining the body

Objective:

To recognize a specific relationship between parts of the body and artistic representation of them. Through this activity it is hoped that positive reinforcement of body recognition and artistic expression can be combined.

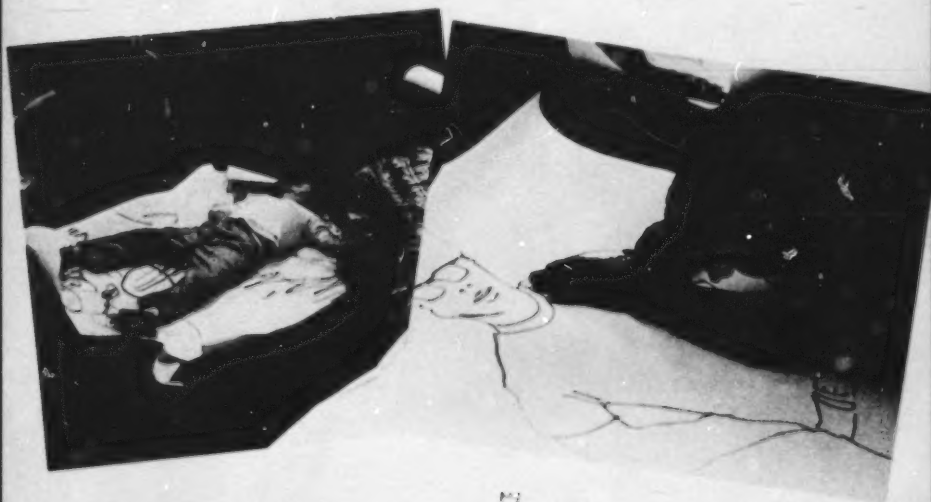
Activities:

Tracing of hands, and entire body on large paper with encouragement to fill in contours. Portrait tracing: students tracing each others portraits on thin plastic taped to a free standing "window" with paint and brush. See below.

Independent expression after specific object-image relationship has been demonstrated.

Procedure:

1. Introduction and demonstration of first activity hand, body tracing.
2. Individual work with portrait tracing when most of class becomes involved with first activity.



Bodies



Repetitious circular movement will relax and internalize the system. When performed with a prop of ribbon, wool, scarves etc. it can be used to expand the child's focus to encompass larger spatial awareness.

1st project: Develop circular flow of body parts for identification and flexibility of joints. The head can circle to the clockwise or counter clockwise direction. Make the circles larger and slower for control.

The arms can follow circular patterns in forward or backward movement. Make sure you lead both directions for flexibility. Hawaiian music is best for the torso circles – again in both rotations. Lastly, the hips circle at least ten times each direction.

2nd Project: Wool ribbons or scarves put on a colorful display which will delight the group. The scarves can be moved harmoniously if the group is alert enough for directions and timing of swings. Be creative and allow a time for the child's creative play to the dance music.



Bodies in Motion



Photographs by
Wainwright Ausley Felix

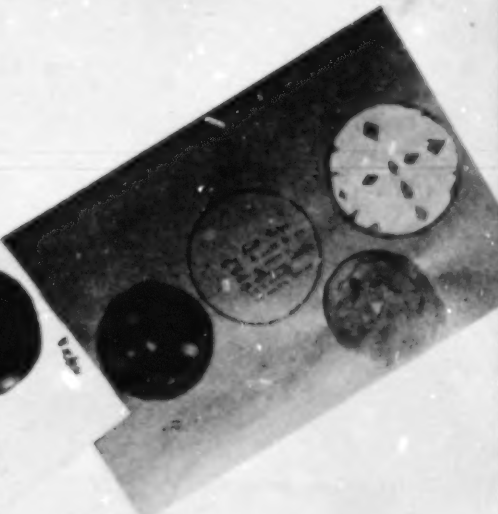
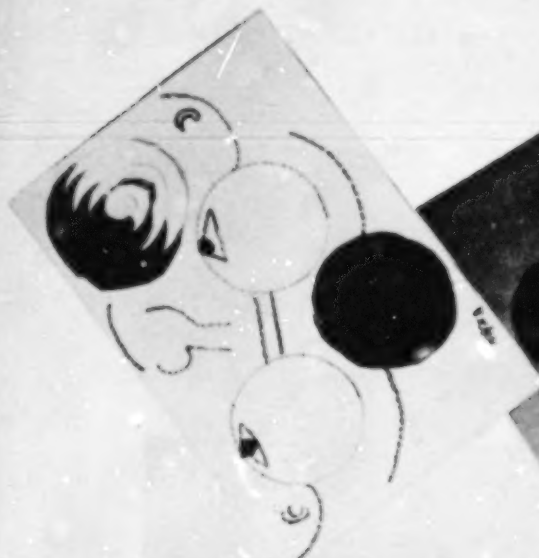
This lesson is coordinated with circle dances, and with poems written about being a circle (the poem may be written in an empty circle on the picture created).

Class participates in a discussion of circles: familiar objects which are circles or which use circles. Also, related shapes are brought in, as they see how to make a circle stand up (slit it along a radius and overlap it to make a cone), how to make a cylinder out of a rectangle (roll it), and how to cut a spiral out of a circle.

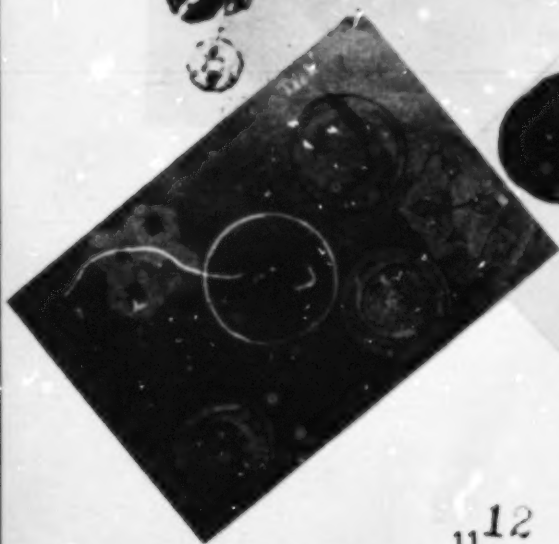
Materials: colored paper
scissors
crayons

Procedure: Children create designs on colored paper with cut-outs and crayons, using circles only. They are helped to cut spirals, which become three dimensional.





My arms are round
They make circles
I move them around
My eyes are round,
My eyes roll around
My green eyes roll around



Objectives: To acquaint the students with circles, by showing them the circles in their own bodies. To have them recognize these circles and to express them verbally or by gesture.

Materials: Teacher's own pad and pencil.

Procedure: Have students take hands and form a circle. Have them walk around in a circle. Have them sit in a circle. Next have them all say "good morning" as a way of loosening up a bit. Tell them that they are sitting in a circle, then read to them a poem about circles:

MY BODY (Karuta-Foyder)

My head is round and
as round as balls
and my eyes roll
and my nose is round
and my mouth is round
My mouth is round
as round as my fingers
and so are my toes
and yawn like a circle
as big as it can be like a hole.

For best results this poem should be acted out, with pauses and frequent stops to bring the students into the action of the poem on a personal basis, e.g. "Eddie, let me see you roll your eyes." After reading the poem, go around the circle asking each student in turn: "What is a circle on your body?" After obtaining a sentence or two from each student, rather a circle or two: "My head is a circle." "My elbow is a circle."

Go around again asking each student what he or she would do in a circle, what his imaginary circle looks like. Describe it. Do you like being in that circle?

After going around the circle once more ask one student at a time if he would like to go into the middle of the circle and act out the poem while you read it aloud with expression. We found this very successful, almost every one wanting a turn and then acting out certain lines in the poem: My Body Can Be a Circle.

After everyone has had another turn, stand up again. Ask someone to enter the middle of the circle and do something round. After one person has done something in the middle of the circle ask another person (girl/boy) to join and together to do something in a circle. (On this day a boy and a girl danced in a circle).

Follow Up. To put the poem in a circle drawing that the student makes in art. To perhaps try another shape, but only with groups that need constant re-inforcement, not with older people who might feel it too baby-ish.

The eagle flies
over the mountains
round and round
He's like a dove
that shoots up into the air.
He stops wandering.
Will he ever turn around.

Chris M.
Pinesbridge School

In an interdisciplinary approach to working with handicapped children in the arts, coordination among the artists is essential. Co-operative planning enables each artist to "feed off" the others. The same materials can even be shared by all three artists, each using them in a unique way. This provides a lot of reinforcement for the children.

For example, in a lesson on texture, we prepared a "feely bag" of items with different textures: i.e. a pine cone, cotton, pliers, tissue paper, a sponge ball, a stick, a paint brush, etc. The poet stressed the description of the objects, having the children feel them with their eyes closed. The visual artist focused on a tissue-paper collage project. (While the children do not have many skills involving coordination, they all can pick out colors, rip tissue, and brush paste on.) And the dancer led the group in exploring "hard" and "soft" sounds and movements, and then dancing with streamers made from the tissue paper (similar to the art material).

Another way of combining art and poetry is to create both on the same paper. The drawing or design can be made with an area left empty for the poem; or the art can be created to illustrate the poem written.

A project involving making masks combines all three areas extremely well. The art facet is the actual creating of the masks; the poetry and dance can be combined in "acting out" feelings or situations with the masks.

It is important for all three artists to give the students experiences which stress their abilities rather than their disabilities. For example, in developing art projects, it is the cutting, pasting, picking out colors, that should be stressed. Intricate or representational drawing create intense frustration in most handicapped youngsters.

Providing the children with the materials and a specific theme creates a structure within which the children develop interesting and satisfying projects.

Tissue-Paper Collage

This lesson can be coordinated with a discussion of texture, feeling things with different textures, writing about different textures, and experimenting with "being" different textures.

A discussion of the properties of the tissue paper is a good way to begin, stressing its fragility and transparency.

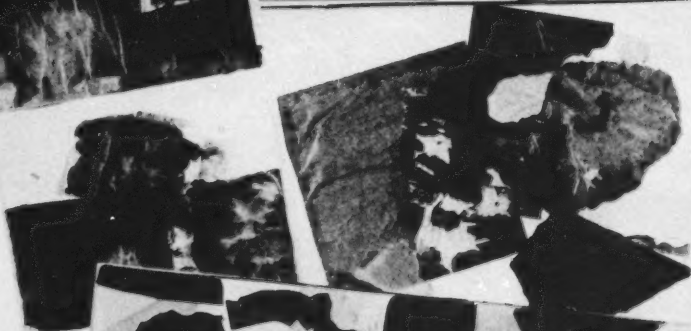
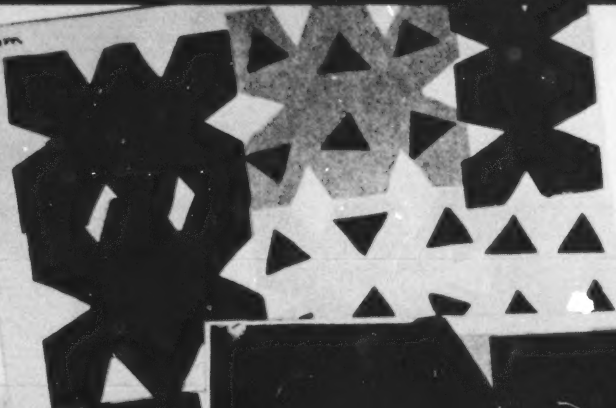
This project is especially good for those students who have poor dexterity, since a minimum of coordination is required.

Materials: colored tissue paper
oaktag
acrylic gloss medium (may be diluted with water)
brushes
scissors

Procedure: Children choose colors of tissue and may cut or rip them into shapes. Then they place the tissue on the oaktag and, using a brush dipped in acrylic medium, brush medium on top of the tissue. This will glue the tissue to the oaktag. Special effects can be achieved by overlapping different colors, as new colors appear in the overlapped areas.

Textures

Tom





- Objective:** To have the students verbalize what an object feels like when they touch it with their eyes closed. To let the children experience an object in a more total way through the sense of touch and then to verbalize that experience.
- Materials:** A plastic bag filled with: a wrench, a plastic beaded necklace, a feather, a rubber ball, a pine cone, a wooden stick, a photo slide box, a paint brush, cork, rope, cloth, a wad of raw cotton, and pliers.
- Procedure:** Poet has children sit in a circle. Asks one child to come into the middle of the circle. Has child hold out hands or reach into bag, with eyes closed. Other children are told not to make a sound. Poet then asks child to describe what he or she feels. What the object feels like: hot or cold, hard or soft, rough or smooth, can it bounce, what it is, what color do you think it is. What would you do with it? These are good questions and make them become more interested in the object. Write the words that the children use to describe the object reading words aloud each time in case the child wishes to change his or her mind. Then, after the child opens his or her eyes, read the whole description aloud. If the children are interested enough, have each child reach in and describe.
- Follow up:** Try it with the sense of smell, or using music, sound. With children who are quiet, try letting them touch another's head or even face (this works well with both older and younger children).

TOUCHING ELLEN'S HEAD

Her head,
without vision
so beautiful,
like a lot of bristles
of hair,
touching me as I touch her.

My mind is a fiery thing,
like a rocket ship,
when it flies
it feels like the earth
is going around and around
in circles.

Chris M.

Pinesbridge School



TOUCHING DIFFERENT HEADS

Soft.

Hot soft.

Soft.

Joe

Pinesbridge School

TOUCHING CAROL'S HEAD

It feels curly.
It feels like going through
a pine forest
and little leaves
falling like venges of lightning.
It makes my mind flow
like a voyage to the bottom
of the sea.

Chris M.

Pinesbridge School

TOUCHING DIFFERENT HEADS

Feels like curls.

Fur.

Fur.

Smoothie.

Curls.

Anne

Touching

Touching is a primary theme with all groups to make personal contact. This is the prime goal for the child to relate to his own feelings and to communicate it non-verbally to another. The disadvantaged never get enough of this sensory development and quite often it is rough painful or restricting touch that he learns. This is why gentle touch and caring can be taught: to be as gentle as raindrops or snowflakes.

The group sits in a circle and watches and listens to the raindrops. The teacher talks about the soft clean water and asks how it feels. She then attempts to dance to the raindrops herself in center circle, slowing moving to touch each child's moving fingers as they copy her hands. This touching once accepted can move to the child's arms, shoulders, head and down to the feet. Then ask the child to touch you - reminding the fingers to be soft and light.

Circular movement can proceed as all stand to move about ever so slowly and gently as raindrops.

A follow up reminder can be made non verbally by offering the hands to be touched whenever recognized.

Rhythms

Any Afro drum rhythm is used to stress the child's natural rhythm. Movements stressed can be bouncing, swinging, jumping, rocking.

Props with musical sounds such as shakers (cans filled with beans or pebbles-taped up hole) should be used. This adds weight for grounding the movement.

The circle is used so all children can be seen and the teacher can move to each child to help the child with his rhythm.

Each child may have a turn leading in which the rest follow the leader's rhythm. Clapping hands to the sound of each child's name with group following same rhythm clap can develop pride and self-accomplishment.

The tambourine is a most enjoyable instrument for children. It adds variations of sound by shaking or tapping it loudly or softly. Allow a turn for each child.

If the movements are small, encourage the child to expand them after a few minutes of repetition. If another child is wild and reckless, encourage more controlled flow. The purpose of opposite extremes is always to expand or control the range of movement to replace the lacking element.

Rhythm sessions with instruments and movements will build the child's energy level and stimulate future development.

Masks

The masks will depict emotions: therefore, a discussion of feelings, and of how the face looks during different feelings, precedes the lesson. Each child may choose an emotion to be portrayed.

Following the making of the masks, dance and poetry are combined in the dramatization of emotions.

Materials:

oaktag
scissors
colored paper, silver foil
wool, material
crayons or paint

Procedure:

Oaktag is cut into ovals (large), with a tab left for a handle on the bottom, and with holes cut for the eyes. Children use materials to depict features in their chosen emotion (eg: eyebrows up or down, eyes wide open or slits, mouth turned up or down). Masks may be decorated with additional materials, in the fashion of African masks (pictures may be supplied to stimulate imagination - however, these are often quite fierce). Wrinkles, hair, etc. may be drawn or glued on.





WORDS

water
sun
air
group
seven
apple
cider
hellmanns
Mayonnaise
extra
heavy

Harold
Group 3
Margaret Chapman School



MORE WORDS

pasteurized
homogenized
vitamin a
and c
milkfat
burger
king
quart
slender
pasteurized
homogenized

Harold
Group 3
Margaret Chapman School



A TREE

I feel big.
You can climb on me.
I feel hard.
I am full of leaves
in summer.
In winter
I am bare.
Jack V.

Mohansic Elementary School



NOTHING

I am nothing.
I feel like I am floating.
Anyone can put their hand in me.
I am air.
I can cause wind.
I can be cold or hot.
I can move clouds.
I cause weather.

Frank

Mohansic Elementary School

RUBBER BALL

like a ball
soft
rubber
play
as soft as a soft ball
it bounces
little bit big and a
little bit small.

Ed

Mohansic Elementary School

HORSE

I come in the barn.
I eat grass.
Then I go outside at night.
Then I come in the barn
and have a baby colt.

Virgil

Mohansic Elementary School

STICK

Tall,
skinny, rough
perdy smooth,
wooden.
You can peel it.

Shawn

Mohansic Elementary School

WHEN THEY TRACED AROUND ME



Felt soft.

Around my feet felt soft.

Around my hands felt soft.

I liked to be drawn.

My elbows drawn.

My knees drawn,

and my foot.

I never knew that I looked
that way.

Janet

Mary's group (early Teens)

Pinesbridge School

CAR

I feel like driving.

My motor is running.

There are people in me.

Jennifer

Mohansic Elementary School

My cheek is a circle.

I would be happy

if I was inside a circle.

Ingrid

Group 4

Margaret Chapman School

BOX

It feels like you can push

it in, but it's hard.

It makes a noise.

It has a cut over here

and you can open it.

It's yellow.

Adam

Sue's group

8-11 year olds

Crompond Elementary School

JENNIFER WITCH

I feel mad.

I'll turn all the class into raindrops.

The rain melts the witch.

Just her clothes are left

and her broom and her hat

and her shoes.

(written by Jennifer and the class)

Crompond Elementary School

7-8 year olds

I'M AN OWL

I am soft.
I have big round eyes.
I whooot.
I like to fly.
I have baby owls
in the owl's bird's nest.
I sleep in the day.
I get food in the night.

Christine
Mohansic
Elementary School
Carol's group

RAINBOW

I like rainbows:
blue-gray, pink, violet,
red and purp . . .
light blue, gray, white
yellow, bright orange
Now a rainbow:
blue-green, gold, silver,
rust, and peanut butter-gold
and lemon yellow
mint green, tan, pink
violet, white, light blue
and red.

Silly N.
Group 5
Margaret Chapman School

BALLOON POEM

I'm inside of a pink balloon.
I'm floating around and around
and up and down and side by side and
I feel that I've got a big headache coming on.
Pounding, pounding, pounding
"Let me out!" I shout.
I've got to get out but . . . and then POP!
It's all over. Poor me!

Sue's group
8-11 year olds
Crompond Elementary School

Selections from the Poets

Billy N.
Group 5
Margaret Chapman School

It is snowing
very hard today.
It is cold.
And it was a surprise
because spring is supposed to be
on the way.
The wind
blows the snowflakes around
and around and around.
And the children
like to see the snowflakes fall
to the ground.
The children are happy, when they see
the snowflakes fall to the ground.

Helen
Margaret Chapman School

CORK

Spongy, but it's hard.
It's rough.
It's round.
Smells like wine.
Let's celebrate!
I'd make a bowling pin.
out of it.

Steven G.
Sue's group
8-11 year olds
Crompond
Elementary School

I'm playing my guitar.
I'm the announcer at the fair.
Breakfast in the morning
every morning:
I got toast and egg
and ice cream comes first,
for breakfast every morning.
10:40 I have breakfast.
Breakfast every morning.
At the fair -- at the fair
I saw -- I saw balloons --
balloons -- that go up, up, up.
Balloons, balloons up they go.
Flowers, flowers.
'at me see the boy. THE BOY.
The Boy. HAY. HAY. HAY!
Tony
Group 3
Margaret Chapman School

NECKLACE

Feels hard.
Has round balls on it.
It's long.
And it's rough.
And you can make a circle
out of it.
A necklace.

Steven A,
Sue's group
8-11 year olds
Crompond Elementary School

My head is a circle
it does exercises.
My head dips.
The freckles on my body are circles.
Big circles.

Donald
Group 4
Margaret Chapman School

NAME POEM

I like basketball.
I like ice cream sundies.
I like to look at sunsets.
I like to look at some pictures
of sunsets.
I like the yellow sun.

Billy N.
Margaret Chapman School

INSIDE A CIRCLE

My finger is round.
My head is round.
I'm inside this brown round table.
It is blue circles.
It is a yellow circle.
If I was inside a circle
I'd turn into a soda.
I'd turn into a pizza
round and round
round as a clock.
I'd use the clock to get out
of the circle.

I'd get out by going through
the door on the clock.

Paper
finger, pinky
two middle fingers
two pinky fingers
hands
neck

throat, coat
all going around
in a circle.

If I was inside a circle
it would be white.

Jonathan
Margaret Chapman School

Chris hops. Chris runs.
Chris puts his arms up in the air outside.
The flowers come up, up, up in April.
Chris T.
Sue & Barbara's group
8-12 yr. olds
Pinesbridge School

Chris hops.
Chris runs.
Chris puts his arms up in the air outside.
The flowers come up, up, up in April.

Chris T.
Sue & Barbara's group
8-12 yr. olds
Pinesbridge School

My knee is a circle.
When I am inside a circle
I flap and squeeze my hands.

Margie
Group 4
Margaret Chapman School

THE SIREN

The siren sounded like a cow.
I was loud.
I liked the sound it made.

Paul
Group 3
Margaret Chapman School

My circle is red.
It is also yellow, blue
and purple.
I don't know if I am alone
in the circle.
I want to be in the circle.
I want Richard to be
in the circle with me.

Bridgette
Group 5
Margaret Chapman School

I WAS IN THE SHAPE, A STATUE SHAPE:

No, it wasn't fun.
It was hard to stay that way
(like clay).
My head was partly in the ground.
It wasn't fun, but when
people looked at me, it
looks kind of strange to them
and funny,
but not to me because
I have to stay that way.

Leslie
Sue's group
Crompond Elementary School

A ROCKET

I'm a rocket.
I'm going to the moon.
I'm not scared 'cause
I'm a machine.
I like going to the moon.
Everytime I go to the moon
the engine drops in the water.
The astronaut will drive
the rocket to the moon.

Robert
Mohandis Elementary School

THE WAY IT IS

The society of life
some people are dumb
some people are smart
Tomorrow will be another day
but soon the fiddler will pay
and I will play
my music and some stupid fool
who thinks that I don't know
what he has done to me
I will make him
die in society's life
I shall dominate
I shall triumph in victory
I shall be the king of the world
And I always say "Triumph over evil never pays"

Sign this
the silent man --
the mighty man
who doesn't live
in a garbage can --
will soon arrive
for his reply
Tell them that it is
the silent man who will
come by
For those who do me wrong will pay
for the crime that they
committed

Chris M
Pinebridge School